



12 Steps of Planning a Project Evaluation

STAGE I: PLANNING

- Step 1. Reexamine the issue, audience, and project objectives
- Step 2. Establish the planning team (including stakeholders, audience, and evaluators)
- Step 3. Establish the goals and objectives of the evaluation
- Step 4. Clarify the time frame in which the activities and impacts (outcomes) are expected to occur
- Step 5. Perform a literature search
- Step 6. Select data collection methods and develop questions based on the evaluation goals and objectives

STAGE II: DATA COLLECTION

- Step 7. Determine the audience sample
- Step 8. Design and pilot the data collection instrument
- Step 9. Gather and record data

STAGE III: DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

- Step 10. Perform data analysis
- Step 11. Manage data
- Step 12. Synthesize information and create report

Guidelines for Conducting a Successful Evaluation

1. Invest heavily in planning.
2. Integrate the evaluation into ongoing activities of the program.
3. Participate in the evaluation and show program staff that you think it is important.
4. Involve as many of the program staff as much as possible and as early as possible.
5. Be realistic about the burden on you and your staff.
6. Be aware of the ethical and cultural issues in an evaluation.

From: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Program manager's guide to evaluation*.



Does evaluation really matter?

"We all know evaluation is important...some of what we learned made me realize just *how* important." In interviews with a variety of agency educators, a common theme was that evaluation is important, but that it's often not thought about until after a program is well underway.

Most educators used feedback forms for the bulk of their evaluation information. In most cases, they found that people liked their programs and offered some minor ways in which the program could be improved. Several of the educators who used evaluation in this way commented that there was no need for more information because they know their program already. Many wanted to continue with gathering the same type of evaluation data in order to maintain a consistent level of participant/audience satisfaction with the program.

On the other hand, educators who wanted to use evaluation to improve their programs asked more people more questions in different ways and at different times in order to get a "good picture of how we're doing." The outcomes from these evaluations revealed that people liked the programs, but also gave the educators a lot of information for making changes and for reporting purposes. One educator was surprised when she realized that not all the findings had to be high scores because she was able to explain how the data were being used and able to show improvement. "That made my boss very happy – I was able to show accountability."

When evaluative data are gathered reveals a lot about program managers' beliefs about evaluation. A clear majority assume that a feedback form is "an evaluation," while others believe it is a pre-test/post-test. Some individuals used team meetings in the planning phase all the way through staff and secondary audience measures in the outcome measurement phase as "parts of how we're learning about our program."

As with needs assessment, the larger the program, the more time that it takes to conduct and run, and the more funding it has, the more evaluation is formalized throughout the process. This makes good sense from an accountability perspective – where you spend your resources, including your time, makes all the difference, and evaluation can help you improve and understand whether your resources are being wisely used.



Five Levels of Evaluation

Level 1. Reaction: *What are the participants' responses to the project or activity?*

Level 2. Learning: *What did the participants learn?*

Level 3. Behavior or Application: *Did the participants' learning affect their behavior?*

Level 4. Results: *Did participants' behavior change move the original situation towards the objective (i.e., the desired outcome)?*

Level 5. Return on Investment (ROI) or Cost-Benefit:* *Is the cost of implementing this project reflected in the level of benefits received from the results?*

*The 5th level, Return On Investment (ROI), is often included among the levels of evaluation, although the original Kirkpatrick (1994) model does not include it.

Source: Kirkpatrick, D. (1994). *Evaluating training programs: The four levels*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.



Types of Evaluation

As with many ventures, there are several different types of evaluation. Depending on the stage of project planning, managers may conduct a needs assessment (sometimes referred to as front-end evaluation), formative evaluation, or summative evaluation.

Needs assessment (front-end evaluation)

As might be expected, front-end evaluation or needs assessment takes place prior to undertaking the project. A needs assessment:

- Gathers information/data about the gap between the current and desired level of audience skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Takes place *before* the project is designed.
- Helps confirm or negate assumptions of audience characteristics and appropriate content, define goals and objectives, and identify stakeholders and potential collaborators.

Questions that might be addressed by front-end evaluation include:

- What are the nature and scope of the problem? Where is the problem located, whom does it affect, and how does it affect them?
- What is it about the problem or its effects that justifies new, expanded, or modified projects or programs?
- What feasible actions are likely to significantly ameliorate the problem?
- What is the appropriate target audience(s)?

For more information on needs assessments, consult Part I of this document.

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation is conducted throughout the project, during project design, development, and implementation. Most often, formative evaluation is used to test methods and materials. At its best, formative evaluation can be an essential decision-making tool that transforms the project. Formative evaluation:

- Gathers information/data about an audience's reaction to and learning from a project's pilot or prototype products/materials. Changes may be made as a result of formative evaluation.
- Gathers information/data about problems with project delivery and assesses progress towards outcomes of a project during implementation.
- Helps provide information that can be used in making decisions about modification, continuation, or expansion of the project. (Results of a formative evaluation may be used to decide how to move forward with an existing project.)



Questions that might be addressed by formative evaluation include:

- Is a particular project reaching its target audience?
- Is the project being implemented well? Are the intended activities, products, or services being provided?
- Is the project effective in attaining the desired objectives or benefits?

Summative evaluation

Again, as might be expected, summative evaluation is typically conducted at the *end* of the project. A formal report is developed that can be submitted to decision-makers and other stakeholders. Summative evaluation:

- Gathers information/data about the audience's skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors at some point in time *after* project implementation begins. Results of a summative evaluation are used to inform stakeholders about the value of a project.
- Informs decision-makers about the value or worth of the project.
- Helps provide the information necessary to make decisions about the continuation, revision, or expansion of the project (Results from a summative evaluation are used to determine if the project was "successful").

Questions that might be addressed by summative evaluation include:

- Did the project reach its target audience?
- Was the project implemented well? Were the intended activities, products, or services provided?
- Was the project effective in attaining the desired objectives or benefits? How did the project impact the intended audience(s)?
- How much did the project cost?
- Is the project cost reasonable in relation to its effectiveness and benefits?

Resources: The National Marine Sanctuary Program has launched a new website focused on the evaluation of environmental and marine education programs. The website includes information on how to create program evaluation plans. It also contains an environmental education literature review, tools and techniques for evaluation, examples of objectives and goals, an evaluation glossary, and an online resource guide to evaluation. <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/evaluation>

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